

VILLAGE ECONOMICS

and wage labour which I have described as affecting the Ovimbundu as a whole. 433
182

It is not easy to compose budgets of household expenditure and income, partly because they have not yet much of a 'book-keeping' outlook, and partly because they suspect the motives behind questions of this sort. My own opinion is that from agriculture the average household would earn considerably less than 1,000 escudos (£12. 10s.) a year. The Banco de Angola in its Report for 1955⁴ gives a budget for an African family at Silva Porto, consisting of father, mother, and two young children, having agriculture as their only source of income. Their total yearly income is given as 7,750 escudos (about £96. 17s. 6d.). Even allowing for the higher prices paid for crops on the railway line, an income of this order is far above anything earned by the average cultivating household, though it might be earned by the few men who cultivated coffee extensively and lived in Portuguese style. 434
(22)

Some details of the economic life of individuals may give depth to this chapter. Kambungo, a kinsman of Sapapula living in Menga, was a man of over sixty who had in his youth travelled on the caravans. He had a large house but lived in a village amongst kinsfolk. In June 1955 he had been in Kwan-yama country where, with shells obtained at Luanda, he had bought cattle and for 15 of the *olemandé* shells he got a sewing-machine. In the year 1955-6 (very roughly from the end of the dry season in '55 to the same period in '56) he had sold ten sacks of maize at 25 escudos each and six sacks of beans for 60 escudos each. He had, however, concluded that maize did not pay and had started to grow coffee. He had sold one beast for 900 escudos (£10. 15. 0), and had also sold ten sheep for 100 escudos (£1. 5. 0) each. He had also sold a coat for 120 escudos (£1. 10. 0). 511

The principal item of Kambungo's expenditure was a bicycle which he bought for 1,500 escudos (£18. 15s.). He had also bought two beds each 100 escudos, and ten plates 100 escudos altogether. He had bought ten bottles of wine, at 5 escudos each, and had also bought some indigenous rum, price not noted. Ten traditional sleeping mats cost 2½ escudos each, and four

⁴ Quoted by Egerton, pp. 124-5.

VILLAGE ECONOMICS

Luvuli's income from bricklaying. The laying of the bricks that 511
form a modern villager's house may bring 100 escudos.

The basic cash need of an Otjimbundu, then, is for money to pay government demands and to provide clothing for his wife and children, who seem more likely than the men to get new clothing every year.⁶ Add to this the possibility of other calls (e.g. provision for a relative's funeral) a desirable income even for this low level of consumption would be 400 escudos (£5) and a more prosperous villager might earn and spend double the amount. Exceptional individuals still remaining within the normal conditions of Umbundu cultural and social life, such as Kambungo, may earn from 2,000 to 3,000 escudos a year, perhaps even more, from agriculture. Maize is the foundation of the agricultural economy, but Kambungo's remark that maize did not pay seems to reflect a trend to find other openings such as growing coffee, which is, however, subject to difficulties of climate.

Within the villages there is some trade in handmade objects 438
such as pottery, sleeping-mats, and sticks for stirring mush, and there are quite a number of bricklayers, carpenters, and tailors 463
(proprietors of sewing-machines) who have acquired European skills which bring them money. These craftsmen are, on payment of a fee of 250 escudos (a figure given me by a tailor), 648
exempt from contract labour.

Many European residents seem to think that the only 434
European products natives desire are cloths, clothing, and wine. This is not so; villagers wanted me to sell them kerosene for lamps, D.D.T. powder for their hair, and soap. It is interesting 454
that the occasions on which an Otjimbundu would accumulate large (for him) sums all fall outside the maize-for-cloth pattern of trading. These occasions are bridewealth payment (and 513
counting all expenses this may well come to 800 escudos—£10 or more), which is a traditional due, the purchase of bicycles (according to place of purchase from 1,200 escudos [£15] to 1,500 escudos [£18. 15. 0]) which are prestige-giving objects, 493
and the trading journeys to buy cattle. Kambungo had 232

⁶ The trader whose opinions I have previously quoted (Senhor Alberto Oliveira Mendes of Chicunda), remarked, 'It is the women who save us. The men make a shirt last for three or four years but the women get something new every year.'

THE OVIMBUNDU UNDER TWO SOVEREIGNTIES

593
178 Going round the houses at night one meets in one house a man and his wife sitting together talking, in another a group of men and women sitting round a fire. This is a very definite change from traditional pattern of social life in which men and women sat in separate groups, a pattern which is still observed at funerals.¹⁵ A man who has a case at the post is likely to take with him his wife as a witness. A husband has the right to beat his wife, and she should show respect to him. In fact wife-beating is rare, and the relationship seems from observation to be often one of mutual affection and close companionship. Informants were divided as to whether one can joke with one's wife—some people ~~may fear that she will cease to respect her husband if he jokes with her~~—but conversationally an Umbundu wife often seems to enjoy an easy familiarity with her husband. A wife may occasionally go and stay with her relatives, and in the neighbourhood she may pay calls on kinsfolk, friends, or co-villagers, without her husband. This contrasts with the way the white and mulatto wives of traders follow the custom of rural Portugal by staying more or less permanently in the house.

The wife has her own fields, and her own granary. If the marriage is polygamous, each wife has her field and granary. [24] Her husband may help her in her fields, although he also has fields of his own. The maize in the husband's granary is sold to [434] produce money to pay tax and to buy clothing for both husband and wife, and the maize in the wife's granary is used for food. If her husband is away a woman will buy her clothes from her own granary. The cooking of maize has not only a nutritive importance but also a social one since it is considered the service, which is specifically wifely. Thus, the explanation I was given for the lower age of marriage emphasizes this—I should explain that people returning from contract labour are sent first to the post at which they were recruited and may have to do an additional fortnight's work there. 'It is because of the hardship.'¹⁶ In the past one married only when one was fully grown. Now it is necessary to have somebody who will send food to the post when you come back.' 'Perhaps,' I suggested, 'your mother

¹⁵ Childs, pp. 32, 33.¹⁶ Chik, a word often used with regard to administrative demands.